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## THEODORE ROBINSON

### A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

On a gray granite shaft in the quiet Evansville cemetery is this simple inscription:

Theodore  
Robinson,  
Born  
June 3rd, 1852,  
Died  
April 2nd, 1896.

And here, marked by day-lilies, meet symbols of that life so brief yet so noble in its manly purity, is the last resting-place of one of the foremost of American artists. A man who had not only a wonderful talent but a strong and gentle nature, and who struggled bravely against obstacles which would have daunted a less courageous spirit.

Theodore Robinson was born in Irasburg, Vermont, June 3, 1852, and in 1856 was taken to Wisconsin by his family.

One of the earliest indications of his genius is shown in his favorite amusement while still a little child. He would sit for hours, his mother said of him, turning the leaves of *The Ladies' Repository*, a magazine noted for its fine illustrations, and looking at the pictures. Over the engravings of landscapes he paused longest.

His mother, from whom he inherited his ability, was a woman of rare sweetness and strength of character. In those earlier years she was his inspirer and most helpful critic.

For several years Mr. Robinson was organist in the church of which his father was at one time pastor. On the fly leaves of the hymn books his busy fingers sketched the faces of his father's parishioners. Indeed, the good people of Evansville never went to church without feeling that their peculiarities were being portrayed by the boyish artist. In many a home are treasured these early efforts of the now famous painter; and the villagers love to talk of the brown-eyed boy who lived among them for nearly seventeen years, and of whose success they are so proud.

At the age of eighteen Robinson decided to devote his life to art, and went to Chicago to study. A portrait of himself was done while in the city, and is considered by those who knew him to be a remarkable likeness. After his return he spent some time in Evansville doing crayon portraits and enlarging photographs to procure means to continue his studies.

In 1874 he entered the National Academy of Design in New York, and there received a medal for drawing from life. He went

to France in 1877 and began his work in earnest, studying under Carolus, Duran, and Gérôme. Under these favorable conditions he made rapid progress. It was here that he painted his "Study of a Girl," the first of his pictures to be accepted by the French Salon. He had just finished a letter to his mother and on his way to post it, he stopped and holding it against the brick walls of a building he wrote on the envelope, "My picture is accepted, and I tremble for joy."

Returning to America in 1880, he spent some time at his old home. Here he showed his sketches and paintings to that best friend of his, who, regardless of the fact that her son had studied under the best masters in France, did not hesitate to criticise or commend. Mrs. Robinson did not like the work from the nude, and it is doubtless due to her influence that he did so little in that direction.

In 1884 Mr. Robinson returned to France, where he remained for nearly eight years, spending much time at Barbizon and Giverny. There he became a student and intimate friend of Claude Monet, who strongly developed his sense of color. The next four years he spent alternately in France and in New York.

In 1892 Mr. Robinson returned to America, and determined to devote himself to American subjects. He believed that in this country he could find pictures as congenial to his temperament as the French and Italian studies of his student days. He had a strong desire to identify himself with his native country, and from this time onward his subjects were purely American. His inclinations naturally turned to his Wisconsin home, but from his early childhood he suffered with the asthma, which always seemed worse in this climate, and he at length decided to remain in the East.

In 1890 "Winter Landscape" was awarded the Webb prize for the best landscape by an artist under forty years of age. The coloring was soft and beautiful, and suggestive of the impressionist school of which he was soon to become the brilliant exponent. Two years later at the same exhibition he was unanimously awarded the Shaw prize of one thousand dollars for the figure painting, "In the Sun."

His summers were spent in Vermont, and in the country life and scenes he found the subjects which were best suited to him. The weary years of struggle and disappointment were over, and he might reasonably have looked forward to a long life filled with the work so dear to him. But always frail from his boyhood, the disease against which he had fought so long conquered in the end, and he died April 2, 1896, in the forty-fourth year of his age. He was brought back to Evansville and laid at rest in the family lot.

Modest and unassuming in his manner, seldom mentioning his own work, yet always ready to praise that of another, handicapped by a physical weakness which compelled him often to lay aside his brush, he is remembered as one of the kindest and most lovable of men.

We sometimes think of Mr. Robinson as a landscape painter, yet there was scarcely any branch of his art in which he was not proficient. His work in figure painting betrays the same beauty of coloring and the close observation of details that is found in his landscapes. In the earlier years in New York he did a great deal of mural painting, and he was equally well known as an illustrator.

Of what he might have been had his life been prolonged, there are only conjectures. Yet, though he died at an age when his work might have been considered as only begun, he had won the reputation of one of the foremost American artists.

The following poem, which appeared in *Scribner's* for June, 1897, indicates that he had a great deal of literary ability:

#### A NORMANDY PASTORAL

She's smiling softly to herself,  
Scarce moving in the morning sun,  
Small heed hath she of her gentle line.  
Javotte, Mignonne.

Her cows in desultory way,  
Choosing first here, then there, a spot,  
Feed daintily in the short, green grass.  
Mignonne, Javotte.

Pausing, a bit of toilette now,  
To make each helps the other one,  
Then to their grazing back again.  
Javotte, Mignonne.

The cow-girl stands in the sun and sews,  
Beams and smiles at, she knows not what,  
Coaxing her cows by their well-known names.  
Mignonne, Javotte.

The sun is high, 'tis time to go,  
Now that the morning feeding's done,  
Back to the stables, shelter and straw.  
Javotte, Mignonne.

O tranquil sunny days, care-free,  
Be sure yours is an envied lot,  
Prim little girl with the gentle cows.  
Mignonne, Javotte.

PEARL HOWARD CAMPBELL.